The Builder.

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QUESTIONING not that our readers, both in town and country, will consider a general Parliamentary enactment for promoting the health of towns in the same important light in which we ourselves do, we this week continue the subject by giving the Parliamentary

Report of the Select Committee appointed to consider the expediency of framing some Legislative Enactments (due respect being paid to the Rights of the Clergy) to remedy the Evils arising from the Interment of Bodies within the precincts of large Towns, or of places densely peopled.

Your committee have deemed it expedient, in the inquiries which they have made regarding the important question, how far the health of the population might be effected by interment taking place within towns or densely-peopled places, to consider the subject under the following heads:—

1. Whether the custom of interments within the precincts of large towns or populous places be injurious to the health of the community.

2. In the event of the injury being proved, what remedies could be suggested.

3. In what manner the remedies ought to be applied, so as not to interfere with vested rights.

I. In reference to the first subject of inquiry, how far the present custom of interment in populous places be injurious to the health of the people, your committee have received evidence from persons in every class of life. That of some of the sextons and grave-diggers in this metropolis exhibits a loathsome picture of the unseemly and demoralizing practices which result from the crowded condition of the existing grave-yards—practices which could scarcely have been thought possible in the present state of society. Your committee have also obtained the evidence of men of a superior education and acknowledged ability; of gentlemen at the head of the medical and surgical professions; of clergymen and high dignitaries of the church; and, after a long and patient investigation, your committee cannot arrive at any other conclusion, than that the nuisance of interments in large towns, and the injury arising to the health of the community from the practice, are fully proved.

Your committee refer to the following extracts, among many other portions of the evidence taken in support of their conclusion, as to the evils of the practice:—

The Rev. J. Russell, D.D., "It is sickening; it is horrible."—Sir James Fellowes, M.D., "It becomes a serious question, with an increased and increasing population, upon what rational grounds such an objectionable feature can be longer continued without danger to the public health."—James Copland, Esq., M.D., F.R.S., Censor of the Royal College of Physicians, "I believe that the health of large towns is influenced by four or five particular circumstances; the first, and probably the most important, is the burial of the dead in large towns. In considering the burials in large towns, we have to consider not only the exhalation of the gases and the emanations of the dead into the air, but the effects that it has on the sub-soil or the water drunk by the inhabitants."

Sir Benjamin C. Brodie, when asked whether he considered the crowded state of the churchyards as one cause of fever or disease in the metropolis, answers, "I have always considered that as one cause." "My opinion is, that the interments in the interior of this town must be injurious to the health of the town." And W. F. Chambers, Esq., M.D., in his letter to the chairman, which will be found in the Appendix, states, "I have no doubt that the fevers which are called typhus, even in this cleanly quarter of London (Brook-street), owe their origin to the escape of putrid miasma. I should presume that over-crowded burying-grounds would supply such effluvia most abundantly."

George Alfred Walker, Esq., surgeon, of Drury-lane, who has considered the subject with great attention and ability, gives the same testimony, and the whole mass of evidence taken before the committee leads to the same result; it has, therefore, not been deemed requisite to give in detail further extracts on this part of the subject.

The chief part of the evidence given before your committee has been in reference to the metropolis; but the evidence received from some intelligent persons, in regard to other large towns, and the mass of correspondence from the mayors, or other official gentlemen, communicated from nearly every large and populous place in the United Kingdom, some portions of which correspondence are inserted in the Appendix, sufficiently prove, to the satisfaction of your committee, that the evils of interment in towns and populous places have grown to such a height, that no time ought to be lost by the Legislature in applying a remedy. That this custom has desecrated the repose of the dead and injured the health and feelings of the living cannot be denied; it has also exhibited the singular instance of the most wealthy, moral, and civilized community in the world tolerating a practice and an abuse which has been corrected for years by nearly all other civilized nations in every part of the globe.

II. The next question, how to remedy the nuisance proved to exist, would resolve itself into a recommendation that such legislative enactments should be framed as would prevent the interment of the dead in or near the habitations of the living. Your committee, however, cannot but foresee that some obstacles must be overcome in effecting this change; besides which an increase of expenditure must be incurred. These difficulties, which your committee trust will be overcome, appear to arise from the following causes:—

The rapid and extraordinary extension of buildings in various parts of the kingdom, which might appruximate them to places of interment when a certain distance was fixed, and might render the necessity of their removal more frequent than at first sight would appear probable.

The outlay requisite to purchase sites for the purposes of interment near large towns must in all cases be considerable, the circumjacent land bearing an increased value in proportion to the extent and population of a town.

The additional charge for removing the remains of the poor to some distance from their dwellings, and the necessity of having an officiating minister at the place of interment, and the consequent increase of expense or inconvenience to the parish or the incumbent, are not to be overlooked.

Although at the first glance these difficulties appear of moment, on consideration they lose much of their importance. The boundaries or limits of towns may be determined, and the flow of human dwellings is more likely to run in any other course than that which leads to the vicinity of a grave-yard or cemetery. Some additional expenses also must necessarily be incurred, but these will be in an insignificant proportion when compared to the great benefit that will arise to the health and enjoyment of the community by a change in the present system of interment. The Bishop of London says, "I am sure that the clergy, generally speaking, would be willing to make some sacrifice for the sake of effecting so great an improvement as is contemplated." His lordship says, "With respect to interments under churches, I consider it altogether an objectionable plan."

The difficulty that was suggested in the committee, arising from the occasional necessity of burying persons of all religious persuasions in the same inclosed ground, if a removal of interments from towns took place, seems obviated by the Bishop of London in the following questions and answers:—

Assuming that a piece of land for a cemetery was purchased by a parish, or by a parochial union of parishes, for the purpose of interment, and assuming that this piece of ground was purchased by a penny rate, or a rate to a certain amount raised upon the parish at large, would there be any objection to a portion of this ground being set apart for dissenters, or for people of any other religious denomination, with this money so raised?—I do not see any objection to having a part unconsecrated, if any person should prefer being buried in such ground; of course it would not be for members of our church; the clergy would be desirous that such persons should be buried in a different part. It would be impossible, unless you set apart one for one, and another for another; you must have a part consecrated and a part unconsecrated in the cemetery for the interment of those not in the communion of the Church of England.

Your lordship sees no objection to the principle, supposing the money to be obtained by a rate levied upon the parish, to its being applied in that manner?—I should say not; I see no objection in principle. I do not suffer my objections to interfere with public measures.

Although the evidence, and especially that of a documentary kind, before your committee, tends to shew that the grievance in question is felt even in many of the smaller towns; yet in a question of so great importance, and involving so many feelings and interests, it appears desirable to proceed cautiously and by degrees. With this view your committee recommend that legislation be, in the first instance, confined to towns of the largest size, and that legislation with respect to the others, if felt needful or desirable, be postponed until a subsequent session.

III. In directing their attention to the third and last subject of their inquiry (the manner in which the removal of places of interment from populous towns may be effected without interfering with vested rights), particular attention ought to be paid to the peculiar situation of the parochial clergy, whose chief source of income, in some cases, is derived from fees received from interments. Of these fees it would be great injustice to deprive the parties. The effects of the contemplated change on the emoluments of the parish clerks is also, in the opinion of your committee, a matter to be taken into consideration. The only means, therefore, of removing the evils arising from the present mode of interment in towns, seems to be to grant a power to parishes, where an additional fund is required, to raise a rate sufficient to cover all the increased expenses which may be incurred under the proposed system.

It appears difficult to carry into execution any of the provisions recommended here without the assistance of some central and superintending authority to be established for that purpose.

In conclusion, your committee cannot but be of opinion that a legislative enactment, prohibiting interments in towns and their vicinity, is required for the welfare of the community, and that it is desirable such enactment should emanate from the government.

Your committee will conclude their report with the following resolutions to which they have agreed.

Resolved, that it is the opinion of this committee:—

1. That the practice of interment within the precincts of large towns is injurious to the health of the inhabitants thereof, and frequently offensive to public decency.

2. That in order to prevent or to diminish the evil of this practice, it is expedient to pass an Act of Parliament.

3. That legislation upon the subject be, in the first instance, confined to the metropolis and to certain other towns or places the popula-

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